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THE REVISED PORTUGUESE ORTHOGRAPHY

Four months after the overthrow of the monarchy in Portugal a ministerial decree from the Interior Department of the new republic instituted a commission, whose purpose was “se simplificarem as grafias correntes, entre si contraditórias, regularizando-as em obediência ao princípio capital da simplificação.”¹ The findings of this commission, under report dated August 23, 1911, and appearing in the “Diário do Governo” nine days later on September 1st, form the basis of the new Portuguese orthography (ortografia portuguesa oficial), which has been in official use in Portugal since the latter date.

Although the question of a simplified orthography had for decades occupied the attention of publicists and philologists, preëminent among them José Leite de Vasconcellos, Candido de Figueiredo, and Aniceto dos Reis Gonçalves Viana,² not until the advent of the republic with its clean sweep in matters governmental, did the reform become possible in official circles.

Following are the main features of the revised system:

I. SIMPLIFICATION OF SPELLING

1. Double consonants are done away with, except as required in pronunciation:

adição > adição,
chamma > chama,
anno > ano,
official > oficial,
metter > meter,
illustrado > ilustrado,
appellar > apelar,
acesso > acesso.

2. Mute consonants suppressed, except where pronunciation of preceding vowel would be influenced thereby:

escripto > escrito,
lucta > luta,
somno > sono,

¹ Commission report, caption “Propósitos da Comissão.”

² The epochal work of Gonçalves Viana, “Ortografia Nacional” may be termed the manifesto of the proponents of scientific orthographical revision.

signal > sinal,

função > função,

but direcção remains direcção (*c* not pronounced, but *e* remains open—without this diacritical *c*, *e* as unstressed would be surd);

auctor > autor,

but actor remains actor (*c* not pronounced, but *a* remains open—without this diacritical *c*, we should have closed *a* as in English “above”);

descrição > descrição,

but adopção remains adopção (*p* not pronounced, but *o* remains open—without this diacritical *p*, *o* as unstressed would be surd, i.e., English “oo” as in “moon”);

likewise, to conform orthography to pronunciation:

prompto > pronto,

assumpto > assunto.

3. *Th*, *ph*, *rh*, and *ch* (when *ch* = *k*) done away with:

theatro > teatro,

philosophia > filosofia,

rhythmo > ritmo,

eschola > escola,

monarchia > monarquia.

4. Mute *h* suppressed, except *h* initial where derivation justifies retention, and final *h* in *oh*! and *ah*!:

apprehender > apreender,

compreensão > compreensão,

Sarah > Sara,

hontem > ontem,

but homem, humano remain homem (Lat. “*hominem*”), humano (Lat. “*humanum*”), while

inhumano > inumano (Cf. regular sound of *nh*).

5. *Y* becomes *i*, and the foreign letters *k* and *w* are suppressed:

typo > tipo,

sympathia > simpatia,

kilograma > quilograma (*K*, however, is retained as the abbreviation).

6. Diphthongal combinations *ae*, *oe*, *ue*, become *ai*, *oi*, *ui*, although in nasal forms *e* is retained:³

³ Some scholars, including Professor Mendes dos Remedios, of the University of Coimbra, deem the uniform use of *i* throughout as preferable.

pae > pai,

vae > vai,

but mãe remains mãe. In the plurals, therefore,

geraes > gerais,

lençoes > lonçóis,

azues > azuis,

but cães, nações remain cães, nações, etc.

II. PRINCIPLES OF ACCENTUATION

1. Words ending in a consonant (except *m* or *s*) or the vowel *i* or *u* (single, i. e., not in diphthong), stress final syllable.

2. Words in other terminations (i. e., vowels except single *i* or *u*, or the consonants *m* or *s*), stress the penult.

3. Exceptions to the above are indicated by written accent, hence all pro-paroxytones bear written accent.

4. For purposes of accentuation diphthongs are not recognized, each vowel therefore counting as a separate syllable.

5. The acute accent (') denotes open stressed vowel, the circumflex (^) closed stressed vowel. The grave accent (`) is employed solely to show, when necessary, the open quality of unstressed vowels, and, therefore, never indicates stress.

Following are typical spellings as affected by this revised system of accentuation:

quasi > quási

germen > gérmén

tambem > tambêm

gloria > glória

serie > série

oratorio > oratório

mutua > mútua

tenue > ténue

perpetuo > perpétuo

facil > fácil

possivel > possível

difficeis > difíceis

applicaveis > aplicáveis

horriveis > horríveis

pais (paiz) > país [but

pais (paes) remains pais]

philosophico > filosófico

philanthropico > filantrópico

áquella (a + aquella) > àquela

romantico > romântico

existencia > existência

bronzeo > brônzeo

In addition to mere simplifications in spelling and accentuation, the Commission concerned itself with other orthographical matters, such as the use of capitals, hyphen, apostrophe, and other punctuation marks, division of syllables, etc. For instance, with infinitives followed by third person direct object conjunctive, the hyphen is now established as directly after the terminal vowel of the infinitive, and

not after the *l* as so many have been accustomed to write it. Thus: *amá-lo*, *fazê-la*, *pedi-las*, and not *amal-o*, *fazel-a*, *pedil-as*, etc. Likewise the apostrophe has been dispensed with, except to represent omissions in dialectical or colloquial speech. Thus the many contract forms hitherto commonly written with apostrophe, as *d'aquí*, *d'este*, etc., are now *daquí*, *deste*, *dum*, *numas*, *disso*, etc., and the conjunctive pronoun forms are spelled *mo*, *tas*, *lha*, *lhos*, instead of the formerly optional *m'o*, *t'as*, *lh'a*, *lh'os*, etc.

Most variants are reduced to a single form, especially as affecting *s* and *z*. Thus all verbs in *-isar* (except, for etymological reasons, *analisar*) become *-izar*: *favorizar*, *temporizar*, etc.; and many words formerly with final *z* should now have *s* instead. Thus *mez* has become *mês*, and proper adjectives such as *inglez* (*ingleza*), *portuguez* (*portuguesa*), etc., become *inglês* (*inglesa*), *português* (*portuguesa*), etc. However, *vez*, *luz*, *raiz* retain the *z* on account of its derivation from the *c* of the Latin (*vicem*, *lucem*, *radicem*), etc., etc.

As compared with the modern Spanish orthographical system the Portuguese is rather formidable. However, the task of establishing a strictly phonetic system becomes much more serious in Portuguese than in Spanish, owing to the open, closed, and surd qualities of the vowels *a*, *e*, and *o* in the former language. This necessitates the employment of two major accents, where the Spanish requires but one. Other complications result from the use of two characters, *ss* and *c* (*c* before *a*, *o*, and *u*) to represent an identical sound, the surd sibilant (cf. *assim* and *acima*, *assunta* and *açúcar*), and two, *s* and *z*, for the sonant (cf. *rezar* and *pesar*, *beleza* and *cortesia*). To maintain the orthography upon an etymological basis, this pairing seems unavoidable.

The new system falls short of phonetic, not only from the point of view of the writer, as suggested above, but from that of the reader, as well. To a reader not thoroughly familiar with the spoken tongue, there is no adequate guide to the open and closed qualities of *e* and *o* in stressed penults. Only to differentiate between parts of speech with these variants of sound but with identical spelling, is the circumflex used to designate the closed vowel: *emprêgo* (noun) and *emprego* (1st. sing. pres. ind. of *empregar*), *espôso* (noun) and *esposo* (1st. sing. pres. ind. of *esposar*), *sôbre* (prep.) and *sobre* (1st and 3rd sing. pres. subj. of *sobrar*), et al. Neither is there suggestion to the uninitiated that *o* in the

masc. sing. of adjectives in *-oso* is closed, while in the other three forms (*-osa, osos, osas*) it is open. The unfortunate fact that *x* is still made to represent four different sounds (*ch, s, ç, cs*) also lessens the phonetic value of the system.

It seems hardly justifiable, moreover, with the clear intent of the Commission to bring about permanency in simplification, to have retained the mute consonants in such words as are shown in I, 2 (*actor, adopção, direcção*). The grave accent is reserved for just the purpose of designating open *unstressed* vowels (II, 5), therefore why not make use of it in these cases, and so avoid the necessity of silent diacritical letters, thus: *àtor, adôção, dirêção*? Likewise there seems to be no excuse for retaining the *c* in the word *carácter*. The spelling *caráter*, without *c*, would indicate the exact pronunciation, and the derived forms *caracterizar, característico*, etc., would quite properly become *caráterizar, caráterístico*, etc.

While there is a gain in precision by the use of accents as established by the orthographical commission, their frequency would have been agreeably lessened had the Spanish diphthongal scheme been appropriated, at least to the extent of recognizing the group of diphthongs *ia, ie, io, ua, ue, uo* as monovocalic for purposes of accentuation, so avoiding the accent in such oft-recurring forms as *glória, série, língua*, etc., but employing it when the diphthong is broken, thus *simpatia*, etc.

It seems unfortunate that the Commission could not have pronounced as between *ou* and *oi*. Except in a limited number of cases, full option is left in this regard, a liberty that prevails under the old régime in but few instances, viz., *dous dois, cousa coisa, noute noite, touro toiro*, et al. In reply to a question upon this point to Dr. Mendes dos Remedios, of the chair of Literature at Coimbra, and one of the early champions of orthographical reform, he writes: "Parece que o verdadeiro e bom caminho, por agora, não está em conseguir uma rigorosa uniformidade, mas em evitar os erros grosseiros que mancham e afeiam a língua." (It is to be noted with interest that the professor himself writes *oa* in words like *língua*, contrary to the pronouncement of the orthographical commission in favor of *ua*.)

The words above of Dr. Mendes dos Remedios well express the present status of the revised orthography: It means a sure step forward, truly not a perfectly phonetic system, but soundly etymological, a working compromise which, while not destroying the identity of Portuguese vocables, does rescue the language from a prevailing

state of orthographic chaos; one that does with absolute accuracy determine stress and eliminate to a large degree the possibilities of error in vowel values.

It seems without question that the new system has come to stay. It is used in all official documents in Portugal, taught in the schools, and most publishing houses adhere to its principles. Since its adoption there have been no modifications, nor have any that are of fundamental nature been considered, although in some minor details there are tendencies on the part of individuals to deviate slightly, especially as to plural forms in *aes* or *aís*, *oes* or *oís*, *ões* or *oís*, etc. Neither has there been criticism of a serious kind—the changes are too solidly founded upon scientific bases and the benefits of the system are too universally recognized, to permit of such. It is true some authors and some publishers have not yet adopted it, but this is due not so much to hostility to the system per se as to apathy and personal taste. There are moreover some periodicals and publications that, while accepting certain of the revisions, do not go the whole way, that is, they do not follow the system of written accents as promulgated.⁴

As to the status of the new orthography in Brazil, it must be said that Brazilians in general do not as yet take kindly to it. This does not mean, however, that interest is not shown the reform on the part of Brazilian scholars. Among its proponents can be counted such an eminent grammarian and philologist as Eduardo Carlos Pereira, of São Paulo, and it is a very significant fact that within a year after the official adoption of the system in Portugal, the director and teachers of the *Gymnasio Oficial* of the state of São Paulo, six hundred public school teachers and one hundred other functionaries in the department of public instruction, presented a formal petition to the state government for the official adoption of the system within their state. This movement was supported by twenty of the Paulista newspapers and periodicals, and one of them, the influential daily, "*O Estado de São Paulo*," along with six dailies of other states, adopted the Portuguese system in toto.⁵ Many literary works moreover are already appearing in Brazil embodying all the simplifications, though disregarding the system of accentuation.⁶

⁴ "Diário de Notícias," "O Seculo," the review "Terra Portuguesa," et al.

⁵ Professor Raul Fonseca, of Itu: *Regras de Ortografia Portuguesa*. S. Paulo, 1913; p. 5, "Uma Explicação."

⁶ See the new (1915) edition of Alencar's "*O Guarany*," from the press of Alves & Cia, Rio.

It is in place here to call attention to the so-called Reforma Brasileira, adopted by the Brazilian Academy in July, 1907. Although antedating the promulgation of the Portuguese reform by several years, and although some works began to appear shortly after following its models,⁷ it has not made large headway. Some of the changes it proposes are revolutionary, without scientific justification, unduly disfiguring many forms. For instance, along with other dogmatic pronouncements, intervocalic *g* and *s* are always replaced by *j* and *z*, respectively, giving rise to such spellings as *orijem*, *dirijir*, *roza*, and *casa*, instead of the etymologically correct *origem*, *dirigir*, *rosa*, *casa*, etc. The Brazilian system fails, moreover, in making no attempt to establish phonetic accuracy by use of written accents. Otherwise most of the simplifications of the Portuguese system obtain in this new Brazilian orthography. On the whole, there is evident all through the Brazilian scheme the lack of the consistently scientific background that is so apparent in the Portuguese reform.

Though prognostication in a matter so involved is futile, it would seem, in the light of severe criticism of their own system by Brazilian scholars themselves, and the unfailing recognition of the superiority of the Portuguese system,⁸ that when the day comes (and this is a probability not remote) that Brazilians finally and generally turn away from the delectable archaisms of the present-day conventional Portuguese spelling, it will be the official Portuguese rather than the Brazilian Academy orthography that will be adopted, and that thus orthographical uniformity can once more prevail throughout the realm of Lusitanian letters.⁹

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⁷ See the 1912 edition of Alencar's "*Ubirajara*," Alves & Cia.

⁸ See Eduardo Carlos Pereira: *Grammatica Expositiva*, 6th edition, S. Paulo, 1917, "Critica," p. 53.

⁹ For a complete glossary under the revised Portuguese orthography, see "Vocabulário ortográfico e remissivo da Língua portuguesa," by Aniceto dos Reis Gonçalves Viana, Lisbon, 1914, Livraria Bertrand; for a brief working handbook see "Pequeno Vocabulário Ortográfico," by António Barradas, Oporto, 1916, Livraria Moderna; for justification of the new spellings, see the work already referred to; "Ortografia Nacional," by A. R. Gonçalves Viana, Lisbon, 1904, Livraria Viuva Tavares Cardoso.